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SUBJECT: CODEL REYES VISITS ARGENTINA

¶1. Summary and Introduction: Rep. Silvestre Reyes, Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), visited Argentina November 28 - December 1 and met with Vice President and Senate President Scioli, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, the chairperson of the Argentine Joint Committee on Intelligence Oversight and other officials. The codel also visited the area along the borders with Brazil and Paraguay. Rep. Michael Thompson, member of the HPSCI, joined Chairman Reyes for part of his schedule. The Ambassador escorted Chairman Reyes to the meeting with Argentine Vice President Scioli, who expressed his admiration for the U.S. Senate and political system. In addition to their consideration of U.S.-Argentine relations, they raised a number of issues related to congressional oversight of intelligence. The codel met with Argentine Congressional Deputy Cordoba, who chairs the Argentine Joint Committee on Intelligence Oversight. She reviewed her committee's authorities and activities since its inception in 2003. At the conclusion of that meeting, Chairman Reyes invited Chairperson Cordoba and members of her committee to Washington in 2008. End Summary.

MEETING WITH THE VICE-PRESIDENT

¶2. The Ambassador accompanied Rep. Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), and his delegation to a meeting with Argentine Vice President Daniel Scioli and President of the Chamber of Deputies Alberto Balestrini. The November 29, 2007, meeting took place at the National Congress. Deputy Stella Maris Cordoba, president of the Joint Committee on Oversight of Intelligence Agencies, also participated.

¶3. The Ambassador noted that Scioli and Balestrini would depart their current positions on December 10 to be sworn in as the new Governor and Vice-Governor, respectively, of the Province of Buenos Aires. Scioli noted that Buenos Aires was the nation's largest province, with a population of 15 million out of Argentina's total of 40 million. The Ambassador said the Embassy was prepared to continue supporting efforts to improve law enforcement and judicial training in Buenos Aires. Scioli thanked the Ambassador and told Chairman Reyes the Ambassador was "active, hard-working and popular." He claimed there was across the board a desire in Argentina for greater cooperation with the U.S.

¶4. Scioli said he had many friends in the U.S., stemming from his first job as a Frigidaire refrigerator salesman and his years of competing in speedboat championships in the U.S. He also recalled intense negotiations with U.S. airlines when he was Secretary of Tourism and Sport, and he also claimed that his personal lobbying of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell helped get the State Department to lift a "warning" against travel to Argentina. Fortunately, he said, American tourists came back to Argentina in droves. The Ambassador pointed out that there had been about 15% growth during the past year in travel in both directions between the

two countries.

¶15. Reyes expressed appreciation for his earlier meeting with his counterpart, Deputy Cordoba, and noted a number of issues that were raised in their discussion, such as the importance of congressional oversight of intelligence functions, the growing trend in both countries for greater transparency of intelligence budgets, and, in Argentina, the concerns (dating from the country's experience in the 1970s with the "Dirty War") about the potential for government abuse of intelligence capabilities. In response to a query by Balestrini, Reyes stressed the importance of close consultations between the executive and legislative branches on intelligence matters even when the two were controlled by opposing parties. They noted the Argentine Congress had one joint, bicameral committee for intelligence matters, whereas the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives each had their own committees.

¶16. Scioli indicated he had been following the races in the U.S. for the Democrat and Republican presidential nominations. Acknowledging that there had been no equivalent debates in Argentina during its recent elections, he said he was particularly impressed by how the U.S. pre-candidates were forced to address major issues, such as health, education and the environment. He also said he considered it instructive for Argentina how, in U.S. political parties, the various pre-candidates and their factions would close ranks once the party had selected a candidate.

MEETING WITH ARGENTINE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE

¶17. On November 28th, the Ambassador accompanied Chairman Reyes and his delegation to a meeting with Reyes's Argentine counterpart, Deputy Stella Maris Cordoba, Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Oversight of Intelligence Agencies. The meeting was held in the committee's conference room at the National Congress and was also attended by the Vice Chairman of the Oversight Committee, Deputy Oscar Rodriguez, as well as members of the committee staff.

¶18. Deputy Cordoba gave a briefing on the structure and responsibilities of her committee, as well as a brief history of the committee's establishment, which was first mandated in 2002 but was not formed until 2003. Deputy Cordoba claimed that Argentina was the first Latin American country to form an intelligence oversight committee within its legislature with real powers. She provided an outline of the committee's bicameral composition, made up of seven senators and seven deputies, selected proportionally based on party representation in the Congress. Deputy Cordoba commented that the committee had modeled itself after its Western counterparts, which they had closely studied via consultations with members of the intelligence committees in the U.S. and Europe, and that they incorporated several features found in other Western countries, such as term limits for members, intelligence budget oversight and control, and the ability to call hearings on specific issues that compelled officials from the intelligence agencies to testify.

¶19. An interesting feature of the Argentine intelligence oversight committee is the role of "national ombudsman," which allows private citizens to seek redress from abuses by the intelligence agencies via the committee. Deputy Cordoba outlined that the overall function of the committee was heavily influenced by the Argentine experience of intelligence abuses during the "Dirty War," which continues to provoke heavy distrust within the Argentine public today.

¶10. Chairman Reyes remarked positively on the strides Argentina had made in instituting legislative oversight on its intelligence agencies, and particularly its focus on preventing future abuses. In light of the previous Argentine visit with the U.S. Congress in 2004, Chairman Reyes extended another invitation to Deputy Cordoba and her committee to

meet with HPSCI in Washington in 2008. Chairman Reyes and Deputy Cordoba also briefly discussed the possibility of conducting staff exchanges so that both countries could learn from each.

¶11. As the meeting concluded, the Ambassador raised with Deputy Cordoba the status of legislation on the Trafficking in Persons (TIP), which Deputy Cordoba has been spearheading. Deputy Cordoba noted that the Argentine Senate had approved its version of the legislation but that the Chamber of Deputies has not reached a similar agreement, and as such, while Argentina remained committed to passing legislation on the issue, it would have to wait until the next legislative session in early 2008. She said she believed a number of the new committee chairs would favor her more comprehensive TIP legislation when the Chamber reconvenes in March.

PRESS RELEASE

¶12. The codel visit was viewed very positively by Argentine interlocutors and set an excellent basis for further cooperation in the future. The Embassy issued November 30 a press release (available on its website) noting that Codel Reyes had called on Vice President Scioli, President of the Chamber of Deputies Balestrini, and with Deputy Cordoba and her Joint Committee on Intelligence Oversight. The press release noted that the codel's meetings covered issues related to congressional oversight of intelligence activities and border security, and that the meetings reviewed the bilateral cooperation agenda in these areas.

¶13. The codel did not have the opportunity to clear this message before departure.

WAYNE